

The Augusta Pulse

For the Employees and Friends of the Augusta VA Medical Center • Spring 2006

This Issue

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The Augusta Pulse is published quarterly for the employees, volunteers, partners and friends of the Augusta VA Medical Center. To submit articles or story ideas for possible publication, contact Janice Kennedy, (706) 823-1733 or via e-mail at Janice.Kennedy@va.gov.

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Director's Message

Many exciting things have been happening at the Augusta VA Medical Center. Over the past few months we have experienced three major site visit reviews from outside organizations. The Commission for Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) paid us two visits; one to the Vocational Rehabilitation Therapy Program and one to the Active Duty Rehabilitation Unit. Surveyors seemed impressed with both programs and based on their feedback, the expectations are that both will receive the full three-year accreditation. There was also a site visit by Georgia Oglethorpe, Inc. This review was in response to our application submitted to the Georgia Oglethorpe State Quality Award. This award is based on the Malcolm Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence and recognizes outstanding small and large businesses, educational institutions, and healthcare organizations that serve as role models for the state of Georgia and are continually working toward assessing and improving the services provided.

I am very proud of the fact that our staff seems to continually shine during these visits. One common theme in the feedback is the recognition by the surveyors that the staff is customer-friendly, provides outstanding service, and is truly dedicated to caring for America's Heroes.

We welcome these independent reviews and realize there is much to learn from each of them. They provide us with a new and objective perspective of how we are doing in the day-to-day business of taking care of patients. By incorporating this valuable feedback we will continue to improve and ensure the outstanding services we provide.

James F. Trusley III
Director, Augusta VA Medical Center



Downtown Division



Uptown Division

Vietnam Veteran Has Dog Tag Returned



Lamar Jackson with Mr. and Mrs. Roskam

Lamar Jackson thought he might be wounded in Vietnam. “I figured it would be in the jungle - out on patrol,” the Augusta man said. But instead, a rocket attack at Da Nang caught him in the middle of a shower. “Incoming (fire) was coming in, and I ran for the bunker,” he said. Before he got there, he was hit by shrapnel in his neck and upper chest. When he awoke in a hospital bed, his dog tag was gone.

On March 10, 2006, 37 years after Lamar Jackson was wounded in Vietnam, a very important symbol of GI life was returned to him...his dog tag. The missing tag was handed back to him by a Chicago woman who recovered it - and dozens more - from a street vendor in Old Saigon. Martha Roskam, who discovered the cache of American servicemen's identification tags during a 2001 business trip to Vietnam with her husband, Verlyn “Swede” Roskam has worked diligently to locate their owners - or at least their families.

“I didn’t think I’d ever see this thing again,” Mr. Jackson said as he accepted the tag

during a ceremony at the Augusta VA Medical Center. Mr. Jackson served in the Army’s 1st Cavalry Division from 1969 to 1972 and spent part of that tour in Da Nang. “They called it ‘Rocket City’ because there were so many attacks,” he said.

It’s anyone’s guess how the tags ended up at a street vendor’s booth in Old Saigon. “I was going along, shopping, and I saw this basket, like a basket you’d serve rolls in, and it had old coins piled on top,” Mrs. Roskam said. What she found when she dug underneath were 37 dog tags on a plastic chain. Later, she told her husband - a Korean War veteran - of the discovery,

and he urged her to go back and buy them. “I purchased them all, for \$20,” she said.

Efforts to locate their owners have included help from her son, Peter Roskam - an Illinois state senator - a private investigator, the military and even a liaison from the White House. Mr. Jackson’s dog tag was the 20th one returned, with more still to go. During Mrs. Roskam’s PowerPoint presentation on March 10, she put faces with the names stamped on the metal tags.

Some of the soldiers who owned the tags perished in Vietnam. Some of them didn’t want to be contacted again, while others were eager to

share their memories. One of them told Mrs. Roskam, gratefully, that “when all you lost is a dog tag, that’s not a bad day.”

Mr. Jackson was delighted to see his tags again, even if the memories behind it were not always pleasant. “My son says he’d like to have it, so I’m giving it to him,” Mr. Jackson said to the crowd assembled in the hospital auditorium. “And for all the veterans who came back and no one ever said ‘thank you,’ today I’m going to say thank you.”



Improving Services for Our Newest Veterans

seamless TRANSITION

The conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan have ended totalitarian regimes and brought hope for a more democratic future for their people. It has also cost the United States the lives and good health of many brave men and women in our armed services.

According to the VHA Office of Public Health and Environmental Hazards, there are now more than 500,000 separated Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF) veterans; 71% of whom are eligible for care. At the Augusta VA Medical Center, it is our honor to provide health care services to these returning heroes. The process of moving from Department of Defense to Veterans Affairs is a daunting

one, but great strides are underway here to make this a painless procedure.

The Augusta VA has created an OEF/OIF Seamless Transition Task Force to identify and address the needs of our newest veterans. This task force is chaired by the Service Line Executive for Allied Health and Chief, Health Administration Department, and includes the Chief of Staff, Nursing, Primary Care, Mental Health, Spinal

Cord Injury, Chaplaincy, Active Duty Rehabilitation, Public Relations, and Voluntary Services. This team works in concert with one another to make the transition between military and VA health care smooth and efficient, without redundancies and duplications. Strategies to ensure consistency, care coordination and seamless integration into VA health care services have been initiated.

The Seamless Transition Team has taken the initiative to meet with returning service members and their families to inform them of the many benefits they are eligible to receive from VA. These outreach efforts are necessary to ensure that OEF/

These outreach efforts are necessary to ensure that OEF/OIF veterans understand their eligibility for two years of health care and future enrollment.

OIF veterans understand their eligibility for two years of health care and future enrollment. The Health Administration Department plays a vital role in the program and participates in outreach efforts throughout Georgia and South Carolina, including visits to National Guard and Reserve Units, providing briefings during unit drills and involvement with community/family support groups. During these outreach efforts, medical benefits, eligibility, and entitlement are discussed, a packet of information is provided to each participant, and staff are available to enroll participants. The OEF/OIF veterans are then referred to the Case Manager for an interview and assistance with any issues they might present. A referral to Primary Care is also provided at that time.

Another important component of the Seamless Transition Team is the care coordination provided by the Social Work Liaison. The strong relationship between the Augusta VA and Eisenhower Army Medical Center (EAMC) has helped in this initiative. Doris Nelson, full-time VA/DoD Social Work Liaison, is stationed at Ft. Gordon and supported by other social workers at the Augusta VA. The liaison plays an important role in educating active duty personnel of benefit options, ensuring accurate information for enrollment, and prompt follow-up for medical appointments. Communication with case managers, points of contacts from other VA's throughout the nation, and prompt data entry are all necessary to ensure that the new veteran will continue to receive effective service after transition.

As we integrate more returning service members into our health care system, there is an increased need for additional specialized resources. One such resource is the new Primary Care Team specifical-

ly designated for OEF/OIF veterans. This Primary Care Team gives new veterans a consistent point of entry into our system, with a designated Primary Care Provider, Dr. Warren Whitlock, and Social Worker, Wendell Riley, who coordinates the care

received and works closely with the VA/DoD Liaison social worker. Nurses are also a key component for the success of this team and are dedicated to patient focused care to meet the need of our newest veterans. Of the OEF/OIF veterans utilizing VA health care, 53% are between the ages of 20 and 29, and 13% are women, which is a higher percentage of female veterans than found with other established veterans. A large number of OEF/OIF veterans have received a diagnosis of PTSD. In response, a comprehensive PTSD treatment program is being expanded to meet these special needs.

The Primary Care Team has also been working with other services on the use of technology enhancement for OEF/OIF veterans. The regional Information Technology Medical Director, Dr. Himanshu Singh, is working with the team for improved data collection and to expand the training opportunities for voice command and dictation systems for patients. Dr. Singh, Dr. Whitlock, and partners in Vocational Rehabilitation and Mental Health are looking at the outcome of implementation of voice interface with computer use in a select population of veterans who have coordination problems, brain or amputation injuries. If successful, the program would be expanded for greater access.

An upcoming addition to the outreach efforts is the Transition Center. This center will be an off-site facility located in the local community. It is built around the theme of "A Soldier's Village -Building Trust with VA", and will provide a trusting environment with a nurturing home-like atmosphere that is easily accessible to OEF/OIF service members, veterans and their families. A wide range of services will be offered to include family support groups, employment assistance, vocational rehabilitation services, veterans' benefits assistance, peer group counsel-

ing and support, and VA and community resources and referrals. The Transition Center hopes to appeal to those service members, veterans, and their family members who are reluctant to enroll in the VA system.

All of our efforts are strongly supported by VISN 7, which currently has more than 10,000 OEF/OIF veterans receiving care. This places VISN 7 as one of the top four networks in the nation providing care to these veterans. The VISN has just introduced a new Quick-Smart Card that can be worn on an employee's badge to prompt them to properly address and assist OEF/OIF veterans. The card details the steps an employee is to take to properly assist combat veterans during normal business hours and after hours. The Quick-Smart Card also lists the six steps to determine veteran eligibility and reinforces the VISN 7 standard that employees should do everything possible to help the world's greatest military access the world's greatest care. In conjunction with the efforts, an emphasis has been placed on increasing awareness of the OEF/OIF veteran throughout the medical center. This has been accomplished through the Seamless Transition education provided

As we integrate more returning service members into our health care system, there is an increased need for additional specialized resources.

to staff members. Power points, video presentations, and video links provide an overview of the issues facing OEF/OIF veterans in making a smooth transition from the combat environment to everyday life.

We need to bear in mind that these efforts, while important, in no way mitigates the care provided to the veterans of past conflicts. Our successes and failures in reaching and treating these veterans have taught us how to better care for the OEF/OIF veterans. The struggles of those heroes have ensured an improved outreach and attention to the special needs of our newest veterans. Established veterans also have an important role to play in the transition of our newest veterans as the understanding of their fellow veteran is a valuable part of the successful integration into civilian life. ✦

VAMC Augusta Hosts American Association of Critical Care Nurses



*Left to right back row: Beth Nesmith, Beverly Snyder-DeSalles, Kevin Lulham, Margaret Rollins, Erin Jarvis, Mike Wheeler;
Front row: Deb Erickson, Mikell Dodd, and Lovelia Reese*

Several years ago, the CSRA Chapter of the American Association of Critical Care Nurses (AACN) realized the need for development of a critical care consortium to provide critical care education for the CSRA and surrounding areas.

A proposal to provide quality education for nurses seeking a career in critical care was developed. A local group came together, representing five area hospitals and one school of nursing, holding meetings with clinical nurse specialist, nurse educators, nurse managers, and board members to discuss the possibility of creating this educational opportunity. The discussion revealed that these hospitals had a critical care program, but with limited resources. A consortium was then designed to provide Basic Critical Care Education for nurses already working in the units and nurses desiring to work in the critical care.

Program objectives were established which included: a community standard for critical care education, improved access to

quality critical care education for the nursing community, reduction in the duplication of critical care courses, and reduction in the costs to participants and providers. Currently seven hospitals are represented and have taken advantage of the program which is held in the Education Center of the Augusta VA Medical Center.

The Augusta VAMC is well represented with Lovelia Reese, RN, MSN, CCRN, serving as the current President of AACN. Rose Cowden Wright, RN, MSN, and Diane Gladd, APN, BC, have provided lectures on Neuro-Anatomy and Acute Stroke Recognition and Prevention. A program of this capacity requires a great deal of coordination and dedication. The Critical Care Consortium of AACN is completing their 10th

course and has educated approximately 500 nurses. The Augusta VAMC has provided a supportive and comfortable atmosphere for these intense programs. The Education Center is great for the speakers and the students. Local AACN Board members have commented, "We really like the arrangement of the auditorium and the outstanding support of Medical Media for being there when we most needed them." The AACN and Consortium Boards are very pleased with the overwhelming acceptance of this program in the CSRA hospital community. The program has proven to be well received and is becoming a standard for the participating hospitals.



HPDM and Your Career



HPDM and Your Career Class II left to right: Jennifer Harris, Lori Hall, Darlene Reliford Johnson, Mary Kinzler, Angela Rollins, Joanne Capozzoli, and Melissa Carter. Not pictured, Jane Ballenger.

Everyone is familiar with the expression, “don’t reinvent the wheel,” but what about reinventing you? The Augusta VA Medical Center in conjunction with the VA Southeast Network Employee Education Sub council and the VISN EES Team competitively selected eight employees and gave them the opportunity to do just that.

High Performance Development Model (HPDM) and Your Career was a pilot program targeted for employees, GS 8 and below and Wage Grade equivalents, who desired to gain a greater understanding for assessing their current career and guidance on how to develop a strategy for achieving their ultimate goals.

Through an in-depth analysis of the eight core competencies contained in the HPDM format, each participant was given the opportunity to look at themselves, acknowledge their strengths, and evaluate any shortcomings that might be preventing them from moving forward to achieve the next step in their career/life blueprint. By networking with their classmates and counterparts from the Dublin

and Atlanta VA Medical Centers, each student was introduced to the amazing world of laptops and high-speed internet experiences, video teleconferences, and the critically important written dialogs that were filled with heartfelt thoughts and sincerity.

The eight employees completing the class from Augusta have taken the HPDM experience a step further and continue to meet on a monthly basis, developing projects and coordinating programs to promote the Augusta VA and continue their own self development. This group has definitely raised the bar for future HPDM and Your Career classes. When asked to summarize what this experience meant, one graduate of the class said, “The HPDM and Your Career

course was the bridge that spanned the gap between my today and all my tomorrows.” Look for future sessions of HPDM and Your Career; and don’t miss this opportunity to learn, develop, and perhaps take the next step into your future. The eight participants from the Augusta VA include: Joanne Capozzoli, Secretary, Audiology; Jane Ballenger, Lead Telephone Operator; Lori Hall, Medical Administration Intern; Mary Kinzler, Human Resource Specialist Intern; Melissa Carter, Insurance Verification Clerk; Jennifer Mitchell, Tele-health Coordinator; Darlene Reliford Johnson, CT Diagnostic Radiology Technologist; Angie Rollins, Kinesiotherapy Assistant.



SERVICE AWARDS

EMPLOYEES OF THE MONTH

Janet Campbell - February
Patricia S. McCloud - March
Shirley Porter - April

STAR TRECC CUSTOMER SERVICE RECIPIENTS

Benita Williams - February
Alphonso "Kool"
Gibbs - March
Tonji Norris - April

The following employees have reached a special milestone in their years of government service during the months of November, December and January.

10 Year Service Awards:

Robert D. Gibbs
Runette Griffin
Cheryl V. Jordan
Steven J. Knapp
Anthony A. Maye
Jewel W. Richardson
Laurel A. Tucker

15 Year Service Awards:

Deborah M. Brown
Caroline F. Caesar
Harold D. Calhoun
Malvin B. Coogler
Jacqueline B. Dority
Debra Downcereaux
Uzoma O. Egekeze
Brigitte K. Gary
Atheline Goodwin
Helen G. Gowan
Billy P. Houke
Nancy D. Lucas
Tonji D. Norris
Connie E. Ready
Gloria J. Shipman
Walter R. Terrell
Irma L. Westmoreland
Kimberly J. Williams
S C Boykin-Willis
Roland Witherspoon
Cindy J. Young

20 Year Service Awards:

Barney R. Bell
Donna S. Carpenter
Dorothy M. Durham
Joan A. Franklin
Benita H. Glenn

Almer Griffin
Estella L. Midy
Lydia M. Moore
Mary R. Murray
Diarene Paschall
Judi M. Pilgrim
Freddie Mae Rouse
Kathleen M. Scott

25 Year Service Awards:

Shirley B. Adams
Patricia S. Ford
Curtis L. Graham
Julius Jones
Joyce E. Key
Linda A. Kolmar
Sandra F. Moore
Vanessa G. Sims
James R. Sprott

30 Year Service Awards:

Ronnie A. Armistad
Wayne C. Dietschler
Earnest H. Johnson
Emma Jean King
Rachel B. Kurtz
Missouri H. Scott
Richard E. Smith
Wanda M. Walker

Congratulations to the following new Department Chiefs and Managers

Shirley Padgett was selected Chief, Health Information and Management/Revenue Administration Department. Shirley was the previous Health Information Section Supervisor.

Michael Ostrow was selected Chief, Acquisition & Materiel Management Department. Mike comes to Augusta from the Office of Acquisition and Materiel Management, VA Central Office.

Kimberly Hoge was selected as the Chief, Voluntary Services Department. Kim comes to Augusta from the Wilkes-Barre VAMC.

Mike Pannell, Ph.D. was selected Industrial Hygienist/Safety Manager, Facility Management Service Line. Mike comes to Augusta from Los Alamos, New Mexico.

Julie Dangar was selected for the Patient Safety Manager. Julie was a former resident at the Augusta VA under the Graduate Health Administration Training Program.

SHOUT OUT!

for Outstanding Staff

Two Audiology/Speech Pathology employees have been accepted into doctoral programs – **Debra Gilstrap** will begin her Doctor of Audiology program in June 2006 and **Jennifer Pace** began her Doctor of Speech Pathology program in May.

Gary Hann, Ph.D., Active Duty Rehabilitation Unit, recently co-authored an article that was published in the Professional Psychology: Research and Practice about reaching underserved HIV-Positive individuals.

Denise Evans, MD, Mental Health & Geriatrics Service Line, **Lorraine Clarke, RN, MS**, Active Duty Rehabilitation Unit, **Linda Dailey, HRM**, **Priscilla Bazil**, Fiscal and **Kim Barry, Au.D.**, Audiology/Speech Pathology Department have been selected for the 2006 Network Executive Healthcare Leadership Institute.

Mail Call!

Mr. Trusley:

I want to send you a quick note to compliment Ms. Becky King, Pharmacy Service, for her continuous help in making sure that I get my meds. This is the first time I have ever written down a note to thank some one, but I think Ms. King deserves to be thanked.

DD

Dear Mr. Trusley,

This is in reference to all the wonderful care my father-in-law received while he was in your hospital. He was admitted to Unit 5D and the CCU after seeing his Primary Care PA who noticed a new onset of arterial fibrillation and sent him via ambulance to the Life Support Unit. I want to commend your team for keeping my family informed through out his stay in the LSU and on 5D and CCU, through his discharge home. This is particularly important to me because I am a nurse at the VA, a mom, and a daughter-in-law who is concerned about her family.

I know in this day and time we are all to busy to say "Good Job" and "Thanks." Please let these fine people know that someone noticed what a fine job they all did.

Sincerely,

VI